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The Tree and the Temple: Echoes of a New Ingathering and Renewed Exile (Mark 11.12–21)

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Abstract

This article considers Mark's account of the cursing of the fig tree, read in conjunction with Jesus' temple action. Having reviewed recent proposals on the literary shape of Mark 11.1–12.12, the article proposes a fresh reading of the section's structure. Triple introductions at 11.11, 11.15 and 11.27 are shown to match triple conclusions at 11.11, 11.19 and 12.12, these constituents framing interwoven units running from 11.11 to 12.12. The pattern of triple intercalation suggests that the cursing of the fig tree and Jesus' temple action should be interpreted one in light of the other. The article then considers the intertextual relationship between Mark's narrative and the scriptural texts it evokes. The study uncovers previously neglected echoes vital for understanding the significance of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree and temple action. The 'casting out' motif in Jeremiah 7–8, as dramatically portrayed in Jesus' temple action, is set forth as heralding a 'renewed exile' for those who reject Jesus' message, while the mirror motif of 'ingathering' in Isa 56.1–8, accentuated by the 'withered tree' imagery of 56.3, heralds new opportunity, with those who were previously outsiders to the temple made insiders in the eschatological house of prayer.

Keywords: fig tree; cleansing; destruction; exile; casting out; temple action; intercalation; intertextual; echoes; ingathering; eschatological; gentiles; Jeremiah; Isaiah

Among odd moments in the Gospels, certainly Mark's version of Jesus' cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11.12–14, 20–1) stands out as one of the oddest and most resistant to scholarly consensus. Wendy Cotter likens the problems encountered in the history of investigation on the passage to 'a chronic disorder: the patient ... always on treatments and never really cured'.¹ Studies on the passage have spawned ingenious approaches, and yet these too often lead to 'withered' theological reflections and an admission of helplessness in the face of unresolved interpretive questions.²

Nevertheless, in spite of the historical, literary and theological misgivings that continue to surround Jesus' cursing of the fig tree, considerable progress, if not scholarly consensus, has been achieved, this narrational oddity being read in some quarters as profoundly meaningful. That progress generally has developed via interconnected discussions of (1) the perceived literary shaping of this section of Mark's Gospel, particularly by the use of intercalation; (2) the intertextual relationship of Mark's narrative with the scriptural texts it evokes; and (3) the symbolic significance of the cursing of the fig

¹ W. J. Cotter, "For it Was Not the Season for Figs", *CBQ* 48 (1986) 62–6, at 62.

² So C. Böttrich, 'Jesus und der Feigenbaum: Mk 11.12–14, 20–25 in der Diskussion', *NovT* 39 (1997) 328–59, at 328.

tree as read in conjunction with Jesus' temple action. This article seeks to explore each of these topics, putting forth a new suggestion concerning the structure of Mark's narrative, as well as pointing out previously unrecognised scriptural echoes vital to the text's interpretation. It is suggested, moreover, that the mirror motifs of ingathering and a renewal of exile lie at the heart of Jesus' actions in the narrative.

1. Mark's Use of Intercalation in Recent Discussion

Intercalation involves interrupting one story with another, one piece of tradition 'sandwiched' between two halves of the other, creating an 'outside story' and an 'inside story'. At its most basic, intercalation marks the two stories as significantly related in the eyes of the redactor.³ It is normally believed that Mark uses the device in at least six places: 3.20–35; 5.21–43; 6.7–32; 11.12–25; 14.1–11; and 14.53–72.⁴

In his monograph *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, William Telford highlights Mark's use of this 'sandwich structure', interweaving the fig tree narrative with Jesus' temple action, as vital for interpretation.⁵ Telford notes that it was with the rise of redaction-critical work that the significance of the device became more apparent, specifically pointing to J. R. Donahue's dissertation *Are You the Christ* as marking 'a dialectical relationship between the inserted material and its framework whereby the stories serve to interpret each other'.⁶ In terms of literary arrangement, Telford sees the three-day structure of Mark 11 as awkward and artificial, in that the author of the Gospel has inserted the cursing of the fig tree into an earlier stratum of tradition, interrupting what would have been a natural progression from the triumphal entry, to the cleansing of the temple, to the questioning of Jesus' authority.⁷ Yet, Telford observes that the story has been meaningfully arranged in an intercalated structure to present the cursing of the fig tree and the cleansing of the temple as mutually interpreting, ultimately concluding that, 'By sandwiching his story on either side of the Cleansing account, Mark indicates that he wishes the fate of the unfruitful tree to be seen as a proleptic sign prefiguring the destruction of the Temple cultus'.⁸

Less than a decade later, James Edwards addressed the topic of intercalation in his influential article 'Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives'.⁹ In this article, following the lead of J. R. Donahue, Edwards highlights the theological purpose of intercalation, namely that Mark uses sandwich structures to emphasise key motifs in his Gospel. Edwards, moreover, attempts to demonstrate that normally the 'inner' story, the 'B' in an A¹-B-A² pattern, almost always serves as the key that unlocks the author's theological intension, the middle narrative interpreting

³ D. E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God* (Biblical Theology of the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015) 91.

⁴ See T. Shepherd, 'The Narrative Function of Markan Intercalation', *NTS* 41 (1995) 522–40, at 522; S. G. Brown, 'Mark 11:1–12:12: A Triple Intercalation?', *CBQ* 64 (2002) 78–89, at 78. J. R. Edwards, 'Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolations in Markan Narratives', *NovT* 31 (1989) 193–216, at 197–8 proposes nine uses: at 3.20–35; 4.1–20; 5.21–43; 6.7–30; 11.12–21; 14.1–11; 14.17–31; 14.53–72; and 15.40–16.8.

⁵ W. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (JSNTSup; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980) 15, 21, 35, 47–8, 163, 238.

⁶ Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, 15; J. R. Donahue, *Are you the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark* (SBL Dissertation Series; Missoula, MT: SBL, 1973) 42.

⁷ Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, 47–8.

⁸ Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, 238.

⁹ Edwards, 'Markan Sandwiches', 193–216.

the flanking constituents of the other narrative.¹⁰ With regard to the cursing of the fig tree and Jesus' temple action, Edwards concludes that the two together work to spell the temple's doom under the prophetic ministry of Jesus. Analogous to the fig tree, the 'temple's function is "withered from the roots"'. More than the other intercalations in Mark, the stories here are seen as mutually interpretive, since the withering of the fig tree foreshadows the temple's destruction. Yet, for Edwards, the centre story remains the key, for without it the cursing of the fig tree would be an 'enigma'. The fig tree is the symbol pointing to the enacted prophecy carried out in the temple complex.¹¹

In 1996 Tom Shepherd added to the discussion from the perspective of discourse analysis, particularly seeking to ascertain the role of narrative discourse outcomes in Mark's crafting of Jesus' story, namely that the evangelist not only brings two stories together, but also holds them 'apart in contrast to one another to produce an interpretation'.¹² Shepherd points out that Mark's presentation of the cursing of the fig tree stands as unique in that the 'characters' include inanimate objects, the cursed tree and the temple. He notes, however, that Jesus' 'personification of the tree elevates it to character level and invites the reader to consider Jesus' unusual actions symbolically'.¹³ Further, Shepherd suggests that with the beginning of the intercalation in Mark 11.12–14, two 'gaps' are opened in the story, namely, 'Why did Jesus curse the tree?' and 'What will be the outcome for the tree?' The 'withered roots' of 11.20 provide the answer to the second question, but what of the conundrum created by the first? Shepherd concludes that while the withered roots point proleptically towards the temple's destruction, at the heart of the curse stand the temple leadership, who have failed to respond to the prophetic voice of Jesus, seeking to kill the Messiah who acted for the temple's good. This illustrates a key to understanding intercalations – they create dramatic irony, and in the case of our passages before us, '[t]he cleansing of the temple becomes a curse as the religious leaders plot the death of the purifying Messiah'.¹⁴

In 2002, Scott Brown followed in the footsteps of Shepherd, arguing that the span of discourse from Mark 11.1 to 12.12 actually constitutes a triple intercalation.¹⁵ Brown presents a clear vision of how significant the juxtaposition of cursing the fig tree and Jesus' temple action is from a theological standpoint. Taken on its own, each seems to offer a straightforward point. The cursing of the tree, along with the story's resumption and Jesus' commentary on prayer, may be read as a simple lesson in faith (11.12–14, 19–25). The clearing of the temple appears to be a commentary on the institution's corruption, its failure to fulfil its role as a house of prayer for the nations. Yet, all is not as it seems on the surface, according to Brown, for the excessive, provocative actions shared by the stories suggest to the reader that larger matters are afoot.¹⁶ The anomalous, intemperate actions of Jesus, read in concert with Israel's scriptures, point to the symbolic significance of both actions – they offer a rationale for the real-world destruction of the

¹⁰ Edwards, 'Markan Sandwiches', 196. Significantly, Edwards points out that this narrative device was known in the broader Greco-Roman world, as well as Jewish literature, with authors interpreting one story in concert with another story (p. 200).

¹¹ Edwards, 'Markan Sandwiches', 207–8. Edwards, in conversation with Professor Martin Hengel, points out that in chapter 11 we actually have a double intercalation: temple (vv. 1–11), fig tree (vv. 12–14), temple (vv. 15–19), fig tree (vv. 20–1). As I point out below, I believe a more accurate assessment would limit the first temple pericope merely to 11.11 and would extend the second fig tree passage through 11.25.

¹² Shepherd, 'The Narrative Function of Markan Intercalation', 523.

¹³ Shepherd, 'The Narrative Function of Markan Intercalation', 531.

¹⁴ Shepherd, 'The Narrative Function of Markan Intercalation', 536–7, 39.

¹⁵ Brown, 'Mark 11:1–12:12: A Triple Intercalation?', 78–89.

¹⁶ Brown, 'Mark 11:1–12:12: A Triple Intercalation?', 79–80.

temple.¹⁷ Further, Brown sees Mark 11.1–12.12 as a series of intercalations. In addition to the usual identification of Mark 11.12–14 and 11.20–1 (or 20–5) as framing 11.15–19, Brown considers Mark 11.1–11 and 11.15–19 to be ‘A’ stories framing 11.12–14, and Mark 11.15–19 and 11.27–12.12 as ‘A’ stories framing 11.20–5. Thus, the narrative moves from an initial look at the temple (11.1–11), to the fig tree (11.12–14), to Jesus’ temple action (11.15–19), to the fig tree (11.20–5), to the conflict with the leaders in the temple (11.27–12.12).

It may be suggested that Brown’s positing of a triple intercalation is correct, but several structural observations and slight adjustments to his approach might strengthen the triple intercalation proposal. These observations concern three parallel introductions matched by three parallel conclusions, the observation of which helps in framing the discourse movements running from 11.11 to 12.12. First, it is characteristic of Mark to begin his pericopae with topographical movement.¹⁸ Accordingly, this span of texts has parallel introductions that front each of the three ‘temple encounters’:

Initial entry to the temple upon arrival in Jerusalem	εἰσῆλθεν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα εἰς τό ἱερόν (11.11)
Entering Jerusalem, then the temple to ‘cleanse’ it	ἔρχονται εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα. Καί εἰσελθὼν εἰς τό ἱερόν (11.15)
Entering Jerusalem again, Jesus walking in the temple	Καί ἔρχονται πάλιν εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα. καί ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ περιπατοῦντος αὐτοῦ (11.27)

Mark thus uses the repeated and parallel introductions to craft a framework for Jesus’ movement into the city and into the temple precincts. The section begins with 11.11 rather than 11.1. There are two reasons for this adjustment to Brown’s proposal. First, the pattern of parallel introductions matches the moment at which the temple enters the narrative and thus suggests that a new movement in the discourse begins with 11.11. The oft-repeated refrain by commentators that Jesus ‘looking around’ in the temple is an awkward, anticlimactic conclusion to the triumphal entry misreads the structural framing of the text.¹⁹ Rather, 11.11 opens a span of narrative focused on repeated entry to the temple. Second, notice the shift from the plural subjects in 11.1–10 to a singular subject in 11.11, with Jesus himself and his entrance to the temple put in bold relief. Thus, I suggest that this series of temple encounters begins with 11.11 and forms a discourse movement that is distinct from the triumphal parade that brought Jesus down the slopes of the Mount of Olives and to the edge of the city.

These three parallel introductions, moreover, are matched by three parallel conclusions:

Once he had looked around at the temple, Jesus went out with the twelve to Bethany.	ἐξῆλθεν εἰς Βηθανίαν μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα (11.11)
After Jesus’ temple action, he and the disciples went out of the city.	ἐξεπορεύοντο ἔξω τῆς πόλεως (11.19)
At the end of the parable of the wicked tenants, the religious leaders left Jesus.	καί ἀφέντες αὐτὸν ἀπῆλθον (12.12)

¹⁷ Brown, ‘Mark 11:1–12:12: A Triple Intercalation?’, 81.

¹⁸ R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 634.

¹⁹ On 11.11 as the beginning of a new unit, see Gundry, *Mark*, 634.

Clearly, these conclusions provide a formal closing, a statement about ‘leaving’, to units of text which opened with a statement about ‘entering’ Jerusalem and the temple. The final movement is of two parts that concern the so-called question of authority (11.27–12.12). In the first part, the authorities question Jesus’ authority, and Jesus in turn undercuts their authority with his question about the Baptist’s ministry. In the second, Jesus further subverts their position with a parable. As is widely recognised, while distinct, these two parts of 11.27–12.12 constitute a single encounter with the religious leaders in the temple precincts, as seen by the leaders approaching Jesus in 11.27 and then leaving him in 12.12. In terms of narrative movement – and the broad frame established by Jesus’ coming into Jerusalem and the temple and then leaving – the leaders’ leaving Jesus at 12.12 breaks the cycle and ends the triple intercalation which began with Jesus entering the city and the temple for the first time at 11.11.²⁰

These structural markers place a solid frame around three successive encounters of Jesus with the temple and its inhabitants. Moreover, the placement of the cursing of the fig tree at 11.12–14 also begins with movement, ‘and as they were leaving from Bethany’ (Καὶ τῆ ἐπαύριον ἐξελθόντων αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Βηθανίας, 11.12), which serves as a narrative ‘hook’ facilitating the transition from the previous pericope in 11.11 (cf. ἐξῆλθεν εἰς Βηθανίαν). The resumption of the fig tree story at 11.20, ‘and as they were passing by early in the morning’ (Καὶ παραπορευόμενοι πρωῒ), also begins with narrative movement that provides lexical hooks to the previous unit. The participle παραπορευόμενοι provides a lexical link in conjunction with the cognate ἐξεπορεύοντο in 11.19, and the πρωῒ of 11.20 offers a contrasting ‘hook’ to ὧπὲ of 11.19.²¹

Far from being awkward, Mark’s literary craftsmanship, weaving all five units running from 11.11 to 12.12 into an intercalated, meaningful whole, is now more widely recognised and provides a broader context for the consideration of Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree and temple action. Generally speaking,²² there exists an increasing conviction that intercalation as used by Mark points to the cursing of the fig tree and Jesus’ temple action as mutually interpreting and thus offers one basis for assessing the significance of these interconnected stories. The conviction that the two stories work in conjunction has been deepened by more detailed attention to the intertextual dynamics at play in the narrative.

2. Mark’s Use of the Scriptures: Jeremiah 7–8 and Isa 56.1–8 in Intertextual Dialogue

A second area of burgeoning scholarly discussion in the past half century concerns Mark’s intertextual evocation of the Jewish scriptures. The ‘withering fig tree’ imagery has prompted numerous suggestions as to its scriptural backdrop,²³ and it seems significant

²⁰ Jesus’ interactions with people in the temple continue until the marker at 13.1, ‘As he was going out of the temple’ (Καὶ ἐκπορευομένου αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ), but after 12.12, the main authorities of the temple do not come back into the narrative until their plot to kill Jesus is mentioned at 14.1.

²¹ In addition to the references to the fig tree itself in both passages, note the contrast between how Jesus ‘answers’ (ἀποκριθεὶς) the fig tree at 11.14 and how he ‘answers’ (ἀποκριθεὶς) Peter at 11.22. We might also note the parallel in the successive units, 11.12–14 and 11.15–19, that the disciples ‘heard’ Jesus’ words to the tree (ἤκουον, 11.14), and the chief priests and scribes ‘heard’ (ἤκουσαν, 11.18) Jesus’ scriptural pronouncement.

²² Exceptions include, for example, Gundry, *Mark*, 671–2 and A. Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 524–55. In response to Yarbro Collins, see J. R. Daniel Kirk, ‘Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12–25’, *CBQ* 74 (2012) 509–27, at 512.

²³ In examining the fig tree and related imagery in the Old Testament, Telford considered particularly Jer 8.13; Isa 28.3–4; Hos 9.10, 16; Mic 7.1; Joel 1.7, 12, as well as a number of supplementary passages. See Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, 142–63. On Mic 7.1 as the primary backdrop, see e.g. J. N. Birdsall, ‘Withering of the Fig-tree (Mark 11.12–14, 20–22)’, *ExpT* 73.6 (1962) 191; A. de Quetteville Robin, ‘Cursing of

that both the Isaiah and Jeremiah texts brought together in Jesus' saying at Mark 11.17 have 'unproductive tree' imagery in their broader contexts. Although some scholars have dismissed as inauthentic the scriptural saying at Mark 11.17,²⁴ others such as C. Evans, Richard B. Hays, R. E. Watts and N. T. Wright have offered compelling cases for the significance of Jesus' composite citation in relation both to Jesus' temple action and the withering fig tree, albeit with varied conclusions.²⁵ While a variety of Old Testament contexts and networks of imagery contribute to the conversation, it might be suggested that focus should rest on the Isaiah and Jeremiah passages overtly evoked in the temple saying. These are considered in reverse order.

2.1 Jeremiah's Temple Sermon

A number of scholars have suggested that in alluding to Jer 7.11, Jesus in fact evokes the whole of the prophet's 'temple sermon'.²⁶ Jer 7.11 occurs in a primary unit that encompasses 7.1–15 (LXX 7.2–15),²⁷ or perhaps 7.1–8.3 (LXX 7.2–8.3),²⁸ but messages surrounding the temple continue into what follows in the book. Standing at the gate of the temple, Jeremiah begins the sermon by crying out for repentance from those who falsely trust in the institution as a safe haven while acting unjustly, oppressing the alien, the fatherless and the orphan. They shed innocent blood and commit idolatry (7.5–7). In stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, burning incense to Baal and following other gods, these rebels nevertheless see the temple as a place of refuge, making God's house a veritable 'den of robbers'.²⁹

There are a number of possible passages in the context of Jeremiah's sermon that might be read as reverberating in Mark 11.11–12.12.³⁰ For instance, in the Jeremiah discourse we find a reference to the appropriate 'season' for something (Jer 8.7), the mention of a prayer (7.16), the importance of 'faith' (πίστις, 7.27–8), the sending of the prophets (7.25), the shedding of innocent blood (7.6) and fields being given to new occupants (8.10), all of which appear in Mark's narrative (cf. Mark 11.13; 11.24–5; 11.22; 12.2–6; 12.7–8; 12.9). Yet, attention should be drawn especially to several interrelated motifs particularly relevant to our study of the tree and temple in Mark.

In the broader context of this sermon one finds a use of fig tree imagery that may be related to the cursing of the fig tree in Mark:

the Fig Tree in Mark 11: A Hypothesis', *NTS* 8 (1962) 276–81; on Mic 7.1–2 in conjunction with Jer 8.12–13, see Brown, 'Mark 11:1–12:12: A Triple Intercalation?', 81.

²⁴ E.g. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985) 66–76; Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 526. Sanders has been answered, for example, by R. Bauckham, 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple', *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity* (ed. B. Lindars; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1988) 72–89; C. A. Evans, 'Jesus' Actions in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?', *CBQ* 51 (1989) 237–70; B. Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), esp. 91–111.

²⁵ C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (WBC; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001) 174–82; R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016) 26–9; R. E. Watts, 'Mark', *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 111–249, at 208–12; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996) 417–28.

²⁶ E.g. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 176–9; Watts, 'Mark', 208–12; Hays, *Echoes*, 28–9; Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 418–21.

²⁷ Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, AB 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999) 454–459; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 238–239.

²⁸ P. C. Craigie, P. H. Kelley and J. F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25* (WBC 26; Dallas, TX: Word, 1991) 116–20; Hays, *Echoes*, 28.

²⁹ On the imagery of the 'den of robbers', see Gundry, *Mark*, 644.

³⁰ The parallels here hold regardless of whether one considers the Hebrew or the Greek text of Jeremiah.

When I wanted to gather them, says the LORD,
 there are no grapes on the vine,
 nor figs on the fig tree (וַאֲיִן תְּאֵנִים בְּתֵאֵנָה; οὐκ ἔστιν σῦκα ἐν ταῖς συκαῖς)
 even the leaves are withered (וְהָעֵלֶה נָבֵל; καὶ τὰ φύλλα κατερρήκεν)
 and what I gave them has passed away from them. (Jer 8.13 NRSV)

This fig tree with withering leaves plays two roles in Jeremiah's broader context. First, it points to the rationale for Judah's judgement. YAHWEH looks for fruit but finds none on the vine or the fig tree (both of which represent Judah). Judah had been a carefully picked and cultivated vine from pure stock, but it had become like a wild vine with rotten grapes (2.21); now the vine is empty, the result of wanton rebellion against the ways of God (8.1–12). Second, the withering leaves (or perhaps with the Greek text, the leaves that have 'fallen off') serve as an image of looming demise and exile, depicted vividly in 8.14–16.³¹

Analogously, Mark 11.12–14 also concerns the Lord coming to a fig tree and finding nothing on the tree, which symbolises the fruitlessness of Israel in spite of God's gifts.³² The emphasis on the leaves in Jeremiah's oracle, and perhaps the withering of those leaves, might also be parallels. It is, therefore, not surprising that a number of scholars have pointed to Jer 8.13 as key to understanding Jesus' cursing of the fig tree.³³ For example, Hays interpretes this text as a compelling backdrop for the intercalated fig tree pericopae and the temple action, suggesting that the stories explicitly echo the judgement oracle of Jer 8.13.³⁴ This may be the case, especially if the passage is read in conjunction with 'withered tree' imagery in our Isaianic context, discussed below.

Moreover, Jer 8.13 plays part in another important motif found in this section of Jeremiah. According to the prophet, when God's people rebel against him, *the land is cursed*.³⁵ At Jer 7.20, for instance, we read, 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: My anger and my wrath shall be poured out on this place, on human beings and animals, on the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched' (NRSV). Thus, one of the consequences of rebellion is that the Lord's wrath will be poured out on human beings, animals, 'trees of the field'³⁶ (ξύλον τοῦ ἀγροῦ; עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה) and produce. Might, then, we read Jesus' cursing of the fig tree in part as a dramatic enactment of this form of judgement?

There is yet another motif that runs through this section of Jeremiah, one that lies at the very heart of our span of intercalated texts in Mark 11. As a foundational proclamation of Jeremiah's sermon, God says that if the people repent, they will be allowed to dwell in the land (Jer 7.3, 7), but if they refuse, God will destroy the temple and *cast them out*, sending them into exile. We find the motif, for example, at Jer 7.14–15. Note that the destruction of the temple is assured in the same breath as exile, the two themes

³¹ The meaning of נָבֵל, rendered 'withered', is disputed. The Greek translator interpreted the term with καταρρέω, 'fall off', when used of vegetation.

³² M. Wojciechowski, 'Marc 11.14 et Tg. Gn. 3.22. Les fruits de la Loi enlevés à Israël', *NTS* 33 (1987) 287–9, at 287.

³³ E.g. W. L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 402; see also M. Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark* (Black's New Testament Commentary Series; London: A & C Black, 1991) 261; Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 158; J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 340.

³⁴ Hays, *Echoes*, 75–6.

³⁵ Cf. Deut 28.16; 1 Kgs 8.35–6.

³⁶ Cf. e.g. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, 138, who notes, 'the fertility of the land bears a direct relationship to the spiritual fruitfulness of the people. Where the nation or a righteous remnant within the nation are faithful, the land, and particularly the trees, will flourish. Where the people are faithless, God will strike the land with a curse.' Pointing to the curses of Deut 28, he notes that 'time and again God's curse is actualized through the blasting, smiting or ravaging of the trees and especially of the vine and the fig tree'.

intertwined. The NRSV translates the text as ‘therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, just as I cast out all your kinsfolk, all the offspring of Ephraim’ (emphasis added). The Septuagint rendering of verse 15 reads, *καὶ ἀπορρίψω (תִּכְלֹשְׁתִּי) ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ προσώπου μου, καθὼς ἀπέρριψα τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς ὑμῶν πᾶν τὸ σπέρμα Εφραϊμ*. The Hebrew verb behind the Greek term ἀπορίπτω (ἔλθω) connotes ‘to be thrown, or cast’, and it is used again in Jer 7.29, where the cutting off of hair and flinging it becomes a symbol of the Lord’s rejection of his people. More broadly the motif also finds expression at Jer 8.3 and 8.14, respectively: ‘they chose death rather than life, even for all those of that generation who remain in every place where I have thrust them (ἐξώσω)’ (8.3 LES) and ‘let us go into the fortified cities and be cast out (ἀπορριφώμεν), because God has cast us out (ἀπέρριψεν) and has given us water with gall to drink, because we have sinned before him’ (8.14 NETS).³⁷ This latter verse follows immediately after the fruitless fig tree of 8.13.

Thus, a resonant motif running through this section of Jeremiah’s prophecy concerns the casting out of those who do not listen to the word of the Lord. In this light, it may be suggested that Jesus’ casting out the sellers and buyers from the temple stands as a symbolic echo of the ‘casting out’ motif in Jeremiah, a motif heralding the dark cloud of temple destruction, devastation of the land and expulsion from the city. As Jeremiah’s prophetic word came to fulfilment in the Babylonian exile, following the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple, so Jesus’ symbolic temple action would come to fulfilment in AD 70 at the hands of the Romans. The Empire would lay waste to Jerusalem and the second temple, again casting out the inhabitants of the city into what was for many in effect an ‘exile’ around the Mesopotamian and Mediterranean worlds, with a contingent sent as slaves to Rome itself.³⁸

Thus, in Jeremiah, we find a number of motifs that may offer connections to Mark’s narrative at 11.11–12.12. The most compelling, perhaps, concern agricultural fruitlessness and rebels being cast out. Both of these motifs provide striking images of judgement that might be read as consonant with Jesus’ twin prophetic acts of cursing of the fig tree and temple action. It may be suggested that especially the theme of a renewed exile, a literal ‘casting out’, has largely been neglected in discussions of the symbolism surrounding Jesus’ temple action.

2.2 Isaiah’s Vision for the Temple

The bringing together of Jer 7.11 and Isa 56.7 at Mark 11.17 almost certainly was motivated by verbal analogy, with both passages referring to ‘my house ... called’, in the

³⁷ Although Mark uses ἐκβάλλω rather than ἀπορίπτω or ἐξωθέω, the -ριπτω word group is used elsewhere in the Septuagint synonymously with ἐκβάλλω, as seen, for instance in Jer 22.28, a passage on exile: ‘Iechonias was dishonored like a vessel which is without its use, which was hurled out (ἐξερρίφη), and he was cast out (ἐξεβλήθη) into a land that he did not know’ (NETS). There are a number of places in the Septuagint where the translators use ἐκβάλλω to refer to Exile (e.g. Deut 29.27; Isa 5.29; 22.17; Jer 12.14). Further, if Jesus himself intended his prophetic temple action to be read in light of Jeremiah’s exile motif, it may be that the Hebrew, rather than the Greek text, forms the backdrop for the imagery. It also could be that ἐκβάλλω was simply the much more familiar word in Mark’s vocabulary (see Mark 1.12, 34, 39, 43; 3.15, 22–3; 5.40; 6.13; 7.26; 9.18, 28, 38, 47; 11.15; 12.8; 16.9). The former term is only found at Acts 27.43 in the New Testament; similarly, ἐξωθέω, used at Jer 8.3, only occurs in the New Testament at Acts 7.45 and 27.39.

³⁸ Craig Evans points to the prophet Jesus ben Ananias, who used Jeremiah 7 to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 62–69 (Josephus, *J. W.* 6.300–309). Evans notes the extensive parallels between the story of Jesus ben Ananias and Jesus of Nazareth. See Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 177.

Greek text (Jer 7.11; Isa 56.7) and the Hebrew of Isa 56.7, or simply ‘house ... called’ if considering the Hebrew of Jer 7.11.³⁹

Jer 7.11 ὁ οἶκός μου, οὗ ἐπικέκληται τὸ ὄνομά μου

Isa 56.7 ὁ γὰρ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν

Jer 7.11 הבית הזה אשר נקרא שמי

Isa 56.7 ביתי בית תפלה יקרא לכל העמים

Mark’s citation follows the Greek text of Isa 56.7 exactly except for the omission of the conjunction γάρ: ὁ οἶκός μου οἶκος προσευχῆς κληθήσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (Mark 11.17). Also, the σπήλαιον ληιστῶν of Mark 11.17 matches LXX Jer 7.11, which is a rendering of the Hebrew המערת פרצים.

Isaiah’s prophecy at 56.1–8 presents a stark contrast with Jeremiah’s temple sermon. Jeremiah’s broader context concerns fruitlessness, destruction and the unrepentant being driven out of the land. The vision of Isaiah 56.1–8, on the other hand, heralds fruitfulness, the coming of salvation and former outsiders, both foreigners and Jews, being brought into the Lord’s house, where they will worship YAHWEH.⁴⁰ Jeremiah warns of impending exile. Isaiah envisions a new gathering of those dispersed (56.8).⁴¹ In the context of Jesus’ temple saying, Jeremiah offers a backdrop for the temple Jesus encountered in Jerusalem, while Isaiah presents a vision of the house of prayer as it ultimately would be for those who respond to the ‘good news’ offered by Jesus.

In the context of Isa 56.1–8 we have one of the source texts for Jesus’ provocative scripture saying at Mark 11.17 (Isa 56.7b); yet, here we also find a verse largely underrepresented in discussions concerning the Old Testament backdrop for Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree – Isa 56.3.⁴² In this text we read words of encouragement:

μὴ λεγέτω ὁ εὐνοῦχος ὅτι Ἐγὼ εἰμι ξύλον ξηρόν

ואל יאמר הסרים הן אני עץ יבש

Let not the eunuch say, ‘I am a withered tree’

Notice, first of all, that in the Greek text the word picture is built with the adjective ξηρόν, a straightforward rendering of the Hebrew יבש. The Greek adjective occurs thirty-nine times in the Septuagint,⁴³ meaning variously ‘dry’, ‘dried up’, ‘withered’. In most cases the word refers to ‘dry’ land. A few references speak of parts of a person’s body being dried up, as with the ‘dry bones’ of Ezekiel (e.g. Ezek 37.2, 4, 11), or the ‘dry breasts’ of Hos 9.14; Isa 56.3 also depicts the eunuch’s body as unproductive.⁴⁴ Only four occurrences

³⁹ The Hebrew reads בביתי at Isa 56.5, but Jer 7.11 reads ‘the house which is called by my name’ (הבית הזה אשר) (נקרא שמי).

⁴⁰ So K. H. Tan, *The Zion Traditions and the Aims of Jesus* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 188–9; D. W. Pao and E. J. Schnabel, ‘Luke’, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) 251–414, at 358; see Ps 22.27; Isa 2.2–3; Zeph 3.9–10; Tob 13.11; Pss Sol 17.31, 34; T Benj 9.2.

⁴¹ So e.g. R. E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark* (WUNT 11/88; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997) 330. On the mixed role of ‘the nations’ in Isaiah’s eschatological vision, see especially Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, 319–22.

⁴² Contra R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium. II. Teil: Kommentar zu Kap. 8,27–16,20* (HTKZNT; Freiburg/Basle/Vienna: Herder, 1980) 199, who sees the ‘dry tree’ of Isa. 56 as insignificant.

⁴³ Gen 1.9–10; 7.22; Exod 4.9; 14.16, 21–2, 29; 15.19; Josh 3.17; 4.22; 9.5; Ps 65.6; 94.5; Job 24.19; Hos 9.14; Jon 1.9; 2.11; Hag 2.6, 21; Isa 9.17; 37.27; 56.3; Ezek 17.24; 21.3; 37.2, 4, 11; 1 Macc 8.23, 32; 4 Macc 18.17; Odes 1.19; Wis 19.7; Sir 6.3; 37.3; 39.22).

⁴⁴ Contextually, the word picture in Isa 56.3 almost certainly connotes an inability to be fruitful in life, for 56.5 reads, ‘I will give to them, in my house and within my wall, an esteemed place, better than sons and daughters; I

of the adjective, however, speak specifically of a ‘withered tree’ (ξύλον ξηρόν; Isa 56.3; Ezek 17.24; 20.47; Sir 6.3), and only one of these does so in a passage concerning the temple in Jerusalem; of course that passage, Isa 56.3, is also in the immediate proximity to Isa 56.7, the verse evoked by Jesus in his temple teaching. Consequently, no other text from the Jewish scriptures, considered in the history of investigation of Mark 11.12–21, brings together the motifs of temple and withered tree, and moreover in the immediate context of a passage evoked by Jesus in Mark’s narrative.⁴⁵ Beyond a correspondence in mere imagery, however, the adjective ξηρός is cognate with the verb (ξηραίνω) used with reference to the ‘withered tree’ in Mark 11.20–1: Καὶ παραπορευόμενοι πρωῖ εἶδον τὴν συκὴν ἐξηραμμένην ἐκ ῥιζῶν. καὶ ἀναμνησθεὶς ὁ Πέτρος λέγει αὐτῷ· ῥάββί, ἴδε ἡ συκὴ ἦν κατηράσω ἐξήρανται.

Thus in Isa 56.3 we find ‘withered tree’ imagery embedded in a passage focused on God’s house, the temple, as a place of prayer for all people.⁴⁶ In its original context, the imagery primarily functions as a picture of fruitlessness, but offered in a context of hope: ‘I will give to them, in my house and within my wall, an esteemed place, better than sons and daughters’ (Isa 56.5 NETS). In the eschatological temple of which Isaiah speaks, the faithful eunuch, along with the faithful alien, will be brought into God’s holy mountain and made joyful in God’s ‘house of prayer’ (Isa 56.7a). The outsiders will be insiders through an eschatological reversal.

3. Conclusion. The Symbolic Significance of the Curse and the Temple Action

In the history of investigation, most scholars now accept the intercalation of Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree and temple action as indicating that these entwined stories need to be interpreted in conjunction. This conclusion can be supported further, as we have seen, by probing the broader contexts evoked in the scriptural saying of the temple action periscope. In their respective contexts, Jeremiah and Isaiah embed ‘empty tree’ or ‘withered tree’ word pictures in spans of texts focused on Jerusalem’s temple. Furthermore, the ‘casting out’ motif of Jeremiah mirrors the promise of ‘ingathering’ in Isaiah. So, what might our investigation add to discussions of the symbolic import of Jesus’ actions of cursing a tree and casting people out of the temple in Mark’s narrative?

To date, Jesus’ temple action, whether considered alone or in conjunction with the cursing of the fig tree, has been read primarily along three broad lines of interpretation,⁴⁷ either (1) as a cleansing or messianic restoration, carried out in judgement on temple corruption, at times coupled with the reclamation of the court for the use of gentiles in worship;⁴⁸ (2) as

will give them an everlasting name, and it shall not fail’ (NETS). Thus, temple and withered tree come together, as in Mark.

⁴⁵ Joel 1.7, 12 constitutes the closest counterpart, but Isa 56.3 has the advantage of being in the immediate context of a verse quoted overtly in Mark’s narrative.

⁴⁶ This particular ‘echo’ meets Richard Hays’ ‘tests’ of availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility and satisfaction. The only one of the tests it does not readily satisfy is ‘history of interpretation’ (R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 29–32).

⁴⁷ K. Snodgrass delineates seven options in the history of interpretation. See K. R. Snodgrass, ‘The Temple Incident’, *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus* (Darrell Bock and Robert Webb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) 429–80, at 462–74.

⁴⁸ E.g. F. Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel: Ihre Geschichte im frühen Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964) 171, who focuses on restoration of the court for the gentiles; Ben F. Meyer, *Aims of Jesus* (London: S.C.M. 1979), 170, 201; Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium: II. Teil*, 200–201; P. C. Böttger, *Der König der Juden – das Heil für die Völker* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1981) 77–8; C. S. Mann, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (ABC; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986) 447–50; Gundry, *Mark*, 640, 642; D. E. Oakman, ‘Cursing Fig Trees and Robbers’ Dens: Pronouncement Stories within Social-Systemic Perspective: Mark 11:12–25 and Parallels’, *Semeia* 64 (1993) 253–72, at 268; H. D. Betz, ‘Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15–18): A

a symbolic act heralding destruction (either of Israel, the temple, the temple leadership, Mark's 'crowd', or a combination of these),⁴⁹ at times balanced with an emphasis on the temple's replacement with the eschatological house of prayer; or (3) a combination of options 1 and 2.⁵⁰ In terms of studies done thus far, I generally agree with the second of these options. Yet, in light of the current study, I wish to add an additional interpretive perspective for consideration: *that the temple action also serves as a prophetic and proleptic act anticipating the renewal of what would be for many a literal exile⁵¹ from the temple, the city and the land.*

On this reading of Mark's text, Jesus enters Jerusalem during the final days of his public ministry and carries out twin prophetic acts,⁵² the cursing of the fig tree and the temple action. Both are elucidated by the broader contexts of Jesus' scriptural saying, which is offered as a comment on the temple action particularly (11.17). It may be that, as well as drawing on broader Old Testament motifs, the two parts of the fig tree story take imagery from the respective contexts in Isaiah 56 and Jeremiah 7–8, with the first, 'no figs on the tree', deriving from Jer 8.13 and the second, 'the withered tree', from both Jer 8.13 and Isa 56.3. In both cases this imagery may be read as connoting fruitlessness, but the broader context of the Jeremiah passage also projects reverberations of destruction and exile.

Moreover, in both contexts, tree imagery sits in the shadow of a strong emphasis on the temple, with the travesty of Jeremiah's temple providing a stark contrast with Isaiah's eschatological house of prayer. If Jeremiah's temple sermon offers a dark picture

Comparative Approach', *JBL* 116 (1997) 455–72, at 467–72; M. Casey, *Jesus of Nazareth: An Independent Historian's Account of his Life and Teaching* (London: T&T Clark, 2010) 413; Snodgrass, 'The Temple Incident', 474–5; Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 406; J. Lambrecht, 'The Cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11,15–19)', *ETL* 89 (2013) 103–6, at 106.

⁴⁹ E.g. W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (THZNT; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1977) 311–12, who emphasises that the act was not about reform but served as a pointer to the eschatological house of prayer; D. Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS; Missoula, MT: SBL, 1977) 198; Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, 238; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 61–71; Edwards, 'Markan Sandwiches', 208; J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991) 357–8; Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark*, 265; B. von Kienle, 'Mk 11,12–14.20–25: Der verdorrte Feigenbaum', *BN* 57 (1991) 17–25, who interprets the prophetic word as directed to Mark's 'crowd' rather than Israel (24–5); J. P. Heil, 'The Narrative Strategy and Pragmatics of the Temple Theme in Mark', *CBQ* 59 (1997) 76–100, at 78; Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark*, 348; Brown, 'Mark 11:1–12:12: a Triple Intercalation?', 81; B. J. Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006) 371–6; T. H. Carey, 'Teaching and Tirades: Jesus' Temple Act and his Teachings in Mark 11:15–19', *Stone-Campbell Journal* 10 (2007) 93–105, at 105; J. Marcus, *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009) 791, 793; C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: a Study in its Narrative Role* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) 29–30; Kirk, 'Time for Figs', 517, 520; Hays, *Echoes*, 26.

⁵⁰ E.g. A. Schlatter, *Die Evangelien nach Markus und Lukas* (Stuttgart: Carlwer, rev. edn 1961) 117–19; D. Seeley, 'Jesus' Temple Act', *CBQ* 55 (1993) 263–83, at 283; Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 181–2, who emphasises the role of a king in reconstituting the temple; A. J. M. Wedderburn, 'Jesus' Action in the Temple: a Key or a Puzzle?', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 97 (2006) 1–22, at 14, 18; R. H. Stein, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008) 516, 521; N. Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) 97–9; M. L. Strauss, *Mark* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) 495; S. J. Joseph, 'Jesus and the Temple Incident: A New Proposal', *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 14 (2016) 71–95, at 88, 91.

⁵¹ This thought is made overt in Luke's pericope on the destruction of Jerusalem, 'they will fall by the edge of the sword and be taken away as captives among all nations' (NRSV; emphasis added) (καὶ πεισοῦνται στόμοιτι μοχαίρης καὶ αἰχμαλωτισθήσονται εἰς τὰ ἔθνη πάντα, Luke 21.24; NA²⁸-T). The verb αἰχμαλωτίζω connotes being taken captive and is used, for instance, at 2 Kgs 24.14 of taking the elite of Jerusalem into the Babylonian exile. Eugen Drewermann notes that the cleansing of the temple in Mark evokes Jeremiah's situation, indicating that nothing has changed since the prophet's time, except that now the Romans are the instrument of God's judgement. See E. Drewermann, *Das Markusevangelium. Zweiter Teil: Mk 9,14 bis 16,20* (Olten: Walter-Verlag, 1988) 201.

⁵² On Jesus' self-understanding as an eschatological prophet see e.g. M. Hooker, *The Signs of a Prophet: The Prophetic Actions of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1997); D. C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) 264–5.

of consequences for the ungodly, Isaiah's eschatological temple heralds hope of inclusion for all those who are obedient to the voice of YAHWEH. Furthermore, among the motifs in Jeremiah's sermon we find the imagery of God 'casting out', exiling the rebellious wedded with statements about the temple's destruction. This image of exile echoes loudly and directly in Jesus' temple action, which heralds not only the destruction of the temple but also a renewal of literal exile, as those in rebellion would be cast out of the city and even the land. It may be suggested that the temple action as a prophetic, symbolic act heralding expulsion for those who failed to respond to Jesus' message has yet to find a needed voice in discussions of the significance of Jesus' temple action.⁵³

Moreover, our thick reading of Mark 11.11–12.12 suggests that both the warnings and the promises of these texts are unfolding in mirror fashion in Jesus' moment. In contrast to Jeremiah's 'casting out', or 'exile', stands Isaiah's hope of 'ingathering'. In short, those who respond to Jesus' message, even those who are currently outsiders to the temple establishment, are offered hope; in Jesus' eschatological temple they will be considered insiders in the house of prayer (11.22–5). On the other hand, the current, corrupt insiders, especially the temple leadership, would find themselves 'cast out' as outsiders, shown to be spiritual 'withered trees' in the face of Jesus' eschatological programme (11.26–12.12). This reversal stands at the heart of Mark 11.11–12.12, with Jesus' praying community placed in stark relief over against the temple authorities.⁵⁴ One community will see the fulfilment of a new, eschatological ingathering to God's house of prayer, and the other a new exile from the temple, the city and the land.

Of course, echoes by definition are *faint* allusions. The one who has ears to hear, let them hear. The whispers suggested in this paper are offered for consideration, both because of their affinity with the texts of Jesus' scriptural saying in Mark 11.17 and their consonance with the central images of the fig tree and temple action pericopae.

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⁵³ It is not hard to imagine that for the followers of Jesus, faced with the immediate aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem and her temple in AD 70, the dramatic, prophetic action of Jesus casting people out of the temple would have been read as fulfilled, with the leaders of that institution, along with most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, killed or scattered throughout the broader Mesopotamian and Mediterranean worlds, a significant contingent taken as slaves to Rome itself. Mary Smallwood states that '[t]he Flavian triumph in 71 brought a huge consignment of Jewish prisoners to Rome for slavery' (E. M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule from Pompey to Diocletian: A Study in Political Relations* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2001) 519). John Barclay writes of Rome after the war, 'The influx of prisoners must have been large ... though no doubt Rome disposed of many of the 97,000 in the East' (J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE -117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996) 310). Only about 40,000 inhabitants remained in Jerusalem (M. Grant, *The Jews in the Roman World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973) 201–2, 205).

⁵⁴ It is interesting that in one of Ezekiel's 'withered tree' passages in the Septuagint speaks of just such a reversal:

And all the trees of the plain shall know
that I am the Lord,
he who brings low a high tree
and exalts a low tree
and withers a green tree
and makes a dry tree (ξύλον ξηρόν) flourish.
I, the Lord, have spoken,
and I will do it. (Ezek 17.24 NETS)